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ABSTRACT

Designed for media specialists and educators, this issue reviews 16 short films for children under the age of 14. Films included in the review range from 2 to 29 minutes in length and include song, puppet, verbal, nonverbal, and live-action animation. Topics cover fantasy and fairy tales, handicapped children, advertising techniques, inner city life, and ecology and nature. Produced throughout the 1970s, the films were tested at least three times with different groups of children and evaluated in terms of the children's responses. Each review provides a synopsis of the film, children's reactions to the film, and recommendations concerning ages and programs most suitable for the showing of these films. (LH)

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Young Viewers



Fall 1979 Issue (Volume 1, Number 1)

film review supplement

This is Issue Number One of the Young Viewers/Film Review Supplement, a twice-yearly addition to Young Viewers Magazine.

The Film Review Supplement is designed as a report of what happened when particular films were screened with children. This issue consists of reports on sixteen films which were evaluated by MCC staff and our evaluation interns during 1979. Most of the evaluations were done in New York City schools during the Spring semester.

In future issues of YV/FRS, we will include reports by librarians, art teachers, and museum programmers from across the country in addition to those made by MCC staff and our field evaluation interns. The main requirement, in all cases, is that each film be tested at least three times with different groups of children and evaluated in terms of the children's responses.

Subscribers to Young Viewers Magazine, a quarterly publication on the various media used with children under the age of fourteen, will automatically receive the two annual review supplements. Future issues of Young Viewers Magazine will deal with children's radio, videotapes for children, and a look at what museums are doing with film for children. Future issues will also include reports on conferences as well as interviews with the makers and users of film.

Annual subscriptions are available for fifteen dollars. Just send your check, made out to the Media Center for Children, Inc., to Subscription Department, Media Center for Children, 3 West 29th Street, New York City NY 10001. If you prefer, we can send you an invoice.

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YOUNG VIEWERS/
FILM REVIEW SUPPLEMENT

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UPCOMING MCC EVENTS

Film Circuit

A special circuit of short films for children and family audiences is now being made available to museums across the country. For information about the films on each program and about participating in the circuit, please ask for our circuit flier.

Filmmakers' Workshops

A series of four evening workshops for filmmakers are scheduled for late March and early April 1980 in MCC's new mid-Manhattan conference room. Expert panelists will discuss various aspects of making films for children; topics will range from what films need to be made -- to financing a film. For more information, ask for our workshop schedule.

NOTE: ALL FILMS LISTED HEREIN ARE
COLOR UNLESS B&W IS INDICATED.



ALLIGATORS ALL AROUND 2min
Weston song animation 1976
(Maurice Sendak/USA)

In this homage to (and spoof on) alphabet songs, an alligator (A) combines actions and objects (Bursting Balloons, Catching Colds, Imitating Indians) to illustrate each of the subsequent letters. The film is based on the book by Maurice Sendak and, in true Sendak fashion, not all of the activities represent exemplary behavior (Pushing People); these apparent lapses in behavior amused and delighted the children. The animation is faithful to the original Sendak illustrations and the upbeat song, by Carole King, stays with you long after the film is over.

An excellent programmer, ALLIGATORS ALL AROUND would work as an offbeat introduction to serious animal programs. Because all the props the alligator/s use come out of a brown paper bag, the film is great for dramatic activities and encouraging the recycling of everyday objects as costumes (at one point, an alligator uses a mop for a wig). The film can also be used as an introduction to mime activities, body movement, and activities dealing with change and transformation. The catchy tune makes ALLIGATORS... fine for music activities, particularly rounds -- kids sing along with the film spontaneously. The only time we had less than an enthusiastic response was when ALLIGATORS... was programmed after THE ROBOT (reviewed in this issue). After such suspenseful excitement, the gentle frivolity of ALLIGATORS... was anticlimactic.

The film worked well with all age groups from ages four through nine.

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST 19min
Coronet puppet animation 1978
(Gakken Production/Japan)

A stagey and meticulous production of the fairy tale romance, simply told in puppet animation. The details of the miniature set and puppet costumes especially delighted seven to ten-year-olds and they were fascinated by the special effects.

Beauty's two sisters request jewels and dresses when their father goes on a trip to the city; Beauty simply asks for a rose. When her father tries to pick one from the Beast's garden, however, he is threatened with death unless he brings one of his daughters in exchange. When she hears the story, Beauty volunteers to go and live with the Beast. The horror of her situation is mitigated by the fact that the Beast looks more like a pet cat than a monster, but this didn't seem to diminish kids' involvement. When Beauty asks to be allowed to visit her sick father, the time sequence becomes rather fuzzy. Beast warns that if she doesn't return by midnight, he'll die. Although Beauty seems to stay several days past the deadline, she makes it back just in time to save the Beast from death and he turns into a handsome prince.

The storyline is too complicated for most children under seven (unless they are familiar with the plot), but seven to ten-year-olds loved the drama and suspense and enjoyed the romance. The only technical part that they complained about was that the mouths of the puppets didn't move. Perhaps to compensate for this, the dialog is overly melodramatic -- Beauty's breathy voice is at times quite cloying. Still, the film presents a positive view of a woman who is important to people -- her father falls ill when she leaves and the Beast almost dies in her absence -- and who uses her power to make everyone happy, including herself.

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST can be used to encourage children to make their own puppets and box-art environments. If you screen it with something less "pretty" (such as HANK THE CAVE PEANUT, a 14min peanut animation made and distributed by

Ron McAdow, YELLOW BISON PRODUCTIONS, 5923 Templegate, Houston TX 77066), your children may be less tempted to want Barbie dolls as puppets and may actually create their own original worlds. The pace is rather slow, so program it carefully.

FANTASY 3min Serious nonverbal
animation 1976 (Vincent Collins/USA)

This animation tour de force is a brightly colored catalog of mythic images. Tibetan or Buddhist demons, mandalas, Japanese Noh masks, and Spiderman-type creatures are among the constantly changing and transforming images. The variable and brief electronic music effects add to the denseness of this work -- there's a great deal of material packed into three minutes.

FANTASY excited and stimulated our kids who maintained a running commentary throughout, and were too energized to sit still afterwards. It is nearly impossible to keep track of all the images as they flash or turn on-screen, so you might want to show it twice -- our viewers immediately asked to see it again.

FANTASY works very well for sci-fi, horror, and Halloween programs since the imagery tends toward the horrific. It's a great lead-in to maskmaking, creating flipbooks with transformational images, movement activities, or anything which demands intense visual involvement. The film is great for people three and older.

HUSH HOGGIES HUSH: TOM JOHNSON'S
PRAYING PIGS 4min Center for
Southern Folklore liveaction 1978
(Bill Ferris, Judy Peiser/USA)

This brief film documents a typical hogfeeding on Tom Johnson's farm. Johnson is a Southern black man, born in 1898, who's "been foolin' with them hogs for 35 long years." "Foolin'" means training the hogs to stop several times on their way to the trough, at Johnson's command, while he says grace. The sight of the hogs, grunting and hungry, freezing just inches from the trough and waiting for their master to "say grace" is truly amazing.



Kids tended to be less amazed and amused than frustrated by Johnson's continuous voice-over, which was very difficult for our groups to understand. The film itself requires context and does not work as simple entertainment -- although it might work very well with young groups (under seven's) because they are frequently less concerned with narration -- they'd probably be fascinated with the pigs. Before screening the film, warn your audience that the sound is fuzzy so they won't worry about missing anything. With an introduction and within the proper context (i.e., how do people relate to animals, what animals would you train if you were a farmer?) this film works quite well with nine to twelve-year-olds. When the film was shown without introduction, one tough ten-year-old, not quite sure what to make of it, advised: "Hey, man, we're not into that."

HUSH HOGGIES HUSH can be used in documentary programs on people and lifestyles, for a study of folkways, and for a touch of humor in a lifestyles program.

I'LL FIND A WAY 26min Media Guild
liveaction 1978 (Beverly Shaffer/
Canada)

I'LL FIND A WAY is a masterful portrait of Nadia De Franco, narrated by the nine-year-old Italian-Canadian, a girl with spina bifida. Both filmmaker and subject go out on a limb and their efforts give the documentary a compelling immediacy. The film records several days in Nadia's life, showing her with her family, at school, playing sports, in physical therapy sessions, and on a trip to the C.N. Tower in downtown Toronto.

In the opening sequence, Beverly Shaffer gives viewers an idea of what is involved in making a documentary. There are several takes in which Nadia is introducing herself; she stops, giggling in embarrassment, and says, "I can't do it, Bev." We see and hear the filmmaker giving encouragement, the camera is shown, and we hear "Take one, take two." Finally Nadia composes herself and delivers her cheerful narration. It is only when Nadia says, "I have spina bifida," that the camera moves back far enough to include her legs, braces, and crutches. Until then, the viewer had mentally completed Nadia's body to match her healthy, cheerful face. Nadia explains, matter-of-factly, what spina bifida is. Throughout the film she throws in technical details like the fact that she has to wear sneakers and socks to protect her legs when swimming because she can't feel it when they get scraped. During a scene in school showing kids with various types and degrees of disabilities, Nadia talks about each of her classmates; she describes them, not in terms of their handicaps, but as any child would talk of her companions, "I call him creepy Craig" or "This is the smartest boy in the class." The school scene particularly interested our audiences because some of the children shown had extreme handicaps (one boy writes by typing with a rod attached to a special helmet on his head); Nadia's commentary doesn't mention their handicaps and we begin to see how she sees her classmates.

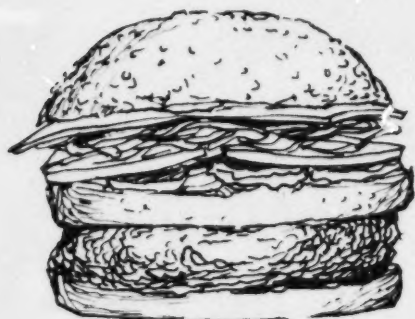
The title comes from Nadia's final statement. While discussing the possibility of going to a normal school, she says that kids might stare at her or make fun of her brace. "I don't know how I'll deal with them. But I'll find a way."

After seeing the film, kids had all kinds of observations about what it's like to be handicapped, how they'd feel if (or when) they were with a handicapped person. They were eager to tell of people they knew who were handicapped and to discuss their problems. Our groups were extremely impressed with Nadia even though they realized, as one girl pointed out, that Nadia was on her best behavior while being filmed. Older

groups caught more subtleties, like when she cheats while playing a game with an elderly man who's taking care of her (a nice portrait of an aged couple, by the way). Some of our groups were restless during the scene where Nadia tours the C.N. Tower, which dragged on a bit too long.

I'LL FIND A WAY is ideal for a program on people and lifestyles, for activities involving family histories, and for discussing family relationships, problem solving, handicaps, and making the best of a bad situation.

It seems to work best with eight to twelve-year-olds.



THE LATE GREAT AMERICAN PICNIC
7min Bailey nonverbal liveaction
1978 (Dan Bailey/USA)

There's an expanse of green hillside under a blue sky. "You are invited to a picnic at Cat Hollow..." say the titles. So, apparently, is the Marlboro man who appears slowly riding over the hillcrest supported by a pair of denim legs with white sneaker feet. He is joined by other billboard images, in their real and various billboard sizes. An oversized pretzel joins the Black Velvet lady. Two of the "puppeteers" give her a cigarette, then carelessly drop it on the grass, but Smokey the Bear comes running in to stomp it out. A chorus line of Coke bottles dance on the hilltop, with an even larger-sized bottle of Pepsi. All this is accompanied by a banjo-picking, whistling, humming country/jazz soundtrack.

The hillside gradually becomes littered with everything from a Stroh's beer can (led in on a lasso by the Marlboro man) to an oversized taco which is dropped from a passing cardboard bomber. The puppeteers (wearing jeans, white T-shirts, and white Lone Ranger masks) choreograph their oversized characters so that the usually static images have appropriate movements -- the horse lopes, the snowman rolls, the Black Velvet lady glides, Smokey dashes in to save the day.

We screened two versions of THE LATE GREAT AMERICAN PICNIC with kids. The shorter, final version was much more successful. The pace was quicker and an anticlimactic scene in which the puppeteers jumped in and out among the figures, waving sparklers, was cut.

Children participated actively throughout -- bouncing to the music, calling out the names of the products as they appeared, and commenting on their relative merits (i.e., Coke versus Pepsi).

This improvisational film is great for a discussion of nutrition and advertising (kids had no trouble recognizing the satirical intent of the film) or for kids to make their own billboards and advertisements. It is a fine lead-in for box art, collage and paper design, mime, maskmaking, and various puppet activities. It's also just plain fun.

Great for all ages from three on up.

MARTIN THE COBBLER 28min Budd
clay animation 1977 (Will Vinton/USA)

RIP VAN WINKLE 27min Budd
clay animation 1978 (Will Vinton/USA)

Both MARTIN THE COBBLER and RIP VAN WINKLE are products of the Will Vinton studios, which specialize in clay animation. The animation is highly sophisticated and both use various special effects and techniques. The bright colors make the films visually appealing but they both had problems with pacing.

MARTIN THE COBBLER is based on a story by Leo Tolstoy and is narrated by his daughter. Martin is an old man whose wife and son have both died. He is bitter and keeps to himself, rejecting the company of his neighbors for the solitude of his workshop. A holy man comes by with a "book of God" and leaves it for Martin to mend the binding. Martin thumbs through the book and reads about a man who has the Lord as his guest and is selfish and ungracious. Martin wonders what he would do if the Lord came to visit him, falls asleep and dreams of such a visit. The following day, he is transformed. He is generous and kind to all who pass by his shop. Martin wonders if the Lord is really coming and decides the dream was wrong. He falls asleep that night and the Lord reveals himself and says that he was actually one of Martin's guests and, "Whatever you do unto one of these, you do unto me."

The content of MARTIN... could pose a problem in some settings. A few children actually asked us why we were showing this film in a school instead of a church.

The mouse who lives in Martin's shop and steals crumbs off the floor also stole the show since s/he is the liveliest character. In contrast to the rest of the characters, the mouse was a dynamo of energy and humor. Kids were fascinated by the animation technique and were eager to discuss how it was done. Sophisticated, upper-income kids understood the film; its moral was pretty much missed by less sophisticated audiences, who were more concerned with the sparkly special effects. We tried to show MARTIN... in one inner-city school during a rainy recess period, with the entire school in the auditorium -- certainly not an ideal situation for a quiet film. The film didn't sufficiently hold their attention and we had to turn it off.

RIP VAN WINKLE is also a moral tale, but it has no religious overtones. Initially, it seems to be faithful to the Washington Irving "folktale." Rip Van Winkle is a lazy man who spends too much time telling stories and entertaining the

townspeople. He is harassed by his landlord who wants to evict Van Winkle for non-payment of rent; his wife is less than pleased with this. Rip goes off to the market to sell his corn so his wife will have some rent money, but he gives it away to a needy farmer instead.

He then goes squirrel hunting and stumbles upon a drinking party of forest gnomes. An elaborate and psychedelic dream sequence follows. Van Winkle talks to rocks and trees, sees monsters, rides on clouds, and talks to a mountain. He wakes up an old man but doesn't realize it. On the way back to town he discovers his own grave. His house has rotted, his wife has remarried, and the townspeople are discussing a strange political development -- the American Revolution. Van Winkle discovers that while most of his friends are dead, his avaricious landlord still wants his rent. He makes the landlord smile by telling a story and, reconciled, they reminiscence about old times. Traditionalists may not like the changes in the story, but kids enjoyed it.

The special effects in RIP VAN WINKLE are more elaborate than in MARTIN THE COBBLER. While MARTIN... takes place exclusively in the cobbler's shop, entire clay hillsides and forests have been created for RIP... and the camera creates added illusions of distance with zooms and pans. As with MARTIN... kids were delighted with the technique and both films can be used to have kids make their own colored clay or "Play Dough" figures. MARTIN... and RIP... could probably be used for discussions (this seems to have been one of the intentions of the filmmakers) but MARTIN... , particularly, needs a receptive audience. RIP... works well for activities involving calendars, seasons, and time capsules. It can also be used for discussions of change and transformation, character studies and role playing, dreams and fantasies, and for journey and mapmaking activities.

MARTIN THE COBBLER works with ages nine and up but seems more appropriate for family audiences. RIP VAN WINKLE seems most appropriate with children nine and over.



NOW WE LIVE ON CLIFTON 25min
Haymarket liveaction 1974
(Blumenthal, Delson, Cuttner,
Schmeichen/USA)

NOW WE LIVE ON CLIFTON is a documentary about the effects of urban renewal and real estate development on a blue-collar Chicago neighborhood as seen by Pam Taylor, age ten, and her brother Scott, who is twelve. An earnest, low-budget endeavor, the film's quality is at times so poor that the message and continuity are lost. Indoor scenes are in parts so underexposed, for example, that it is difficult to see what is being shot. The film generally gives a sense of opportunity missed.

The child subjects are always on camera, showing their former school, going to karate class (Pam), roof jumping (Scott), at home with their older, married sister (she teaches the karate class) and father, who cooks what is obviously a budget-stretching dinner. The kids do a great deal of "explaining." They talk about where their house used to be (in what is now a field at DePauw University). They talk about how realtors are renovating the area, driving prices up and people out. They mention that none of the new people have kids. In contrast to Nadia in *I'LL FIND A WAY*, Pam and Scott lack spontaneity; one feels that they are not at ease with the

cameras or the filmmakers. Perhaps they were asked provocative "adult" questions, but they seemed to be talking about subjects in words few kids use. The indignation they express does not seem entirely theirs. Perhaps they are miming adults, perhaps just trying to give adults what they wanted.

We showed **NOW WE LIVE ON CLIFTON** to nine and ten-year-olds on the Upper West Side in New York, an area with similarities to the Chicago neighborhood depicted. Our viewers were very concerned about where the film took place. Some thought it was Chicago, others that it was New Jersey, and some that it was West 90th Street. Our audience did not understand that the kids in the movie had moved; they had difficulty in understanding the voice-over and said that the karate sequence was too long. But more importantly, our audience didn't seem to empathize with Pam or Scott and seemed unmoved by their apparent moral indignation. Unfortunately, this is a taxing film. It deals with a phenomenon worth exploring but is perhaps more of an impediment than a vehicle for understanding the issues involved.

NOW WE LIVE ON CLIFTON can be used as a lead-in to discussion (if properly introduced) in programs on urban life.

PALLE ALONE IN THE WORLD 20min b&w
MFI liveaction 1950 (Astrid & Bjarne
Henning-Jensen/Denmark)

This dream/fantasy opens with a shot of a child's room, littered with toys, and zooms in on five-year-old Palle, asleep in bed. Across the white headboard float various adult authority figures -- admonishing, coaxing, scolding. When Palle wakes up, he goes into his parents' room and finds his parents are gone. He is alone. He dresses himself and goes outside to discover that no one's out there, either. Palle wanders alone through the city, doing as he pleases. The effect is one of a catalog of things kids wish to do but know they either can't or shouldn't.

He goes into a toy store and takes the toys he wants, into an empty bank and takes money. He tries to buy candy with his new-found money, but there's nobody there to accept it so he just helps himself. Palle gets into a streetcar, drives it until it crashes (he emerges from the wreck unscathed), drives a fire engine wildly until it stops by the side of the road, and, getting lonely, tries to play soccer with a statue but finds it uncooperative. Ah! He gets a new idea and heads for the airport, gets into a plane and flies it up through the clouds into space. He crashes into the moon, which is so small that the airplane is shown sticking out from it sideways, and opens up an umbrella to float home. Back in bed, he calls his mother, who appears for the first time in the film, and says he was dreaming. When she sees her broken umbrella and starts to reproach him, Palle says, "I needed it to get back home. Please don't scold."

Younger kids thoroughly enjoyed *PALLE ALONE IN THE WORLD*, though we found it slow and dated. Children didn't make the connection between the figures scolding at the film's start and the aspect of wish-fulfillment in Palle's dream (he gets rid of them all), but they didn't have to. Apparently, they've all had the same type of fantasy. Two to five-year-olds remained attentive throughout the film and carried on a running commentary, alternately saying what Palle was doing and telling him what to do. Some -- interestingly, largely girls -- felt that Palle was being bad and weren't surprised when Palle's mother appeared at the end. Other children (mostly boys) got very actively involved in Palle's escapades -- cheering at his successes and jeering at his failures. These children became quiet when Palle's mother appeared at the end. Interest was intense at the beginning of each episode and would flag as the action evolved. Each episode went on too long to hold the kids' active attention, with the exception of the fire engine sequence, which is the most cinematic. The film really shows its age when Palle gets into the airplane. This generation of children has seen footage of men on the moon and even five-year-olds know too much about space travel to accept Palle's trip to the moon without comment. They pointed out

the fact that Palle would have died in space for lack of air. A bright kindergarten class remarked that he could not have floated down to earth with his umbrella since there's no gravity in space.

Although over-sevens might think it's "dumb," *PALLE ALONE IN THE WORLD* excited three to six-year-old children, perhaps because it's still rare to see a child of their age on film. *PALLE...* could be used to encourage kids to make up their own fantasy journeys, and is fine for mapmaking and mime activities. You might also follow it with a reading of Maurice Sendak's *In the Night Kitchen* or with any of Windsor McCay's comic strip adventures of "Little Nemo."

PORTRAIT OF A WHALE 12min
National Geographic liveaction 1976
(Des Bartlett/USA)

Did you know that whales snore? That on windy days they stick their tails vertically out of the water and sail? That whales get sunburned? *PORTRAIT OF A WHALE* illustrates these and other intriguing and little-known facts about whales. The omniscient male narration is condescending and pompous, but kids ignored it and concentrated on the amazing visuals and the actual sounds of whales snoring, singing and slapping the water with their tails and fins. The film shows hairs on a whale's chin, scenes of affection between mothers and babies, whales spouting, leaping into the air, "talking" by tail and flipper slapping, and weathering storms (which don't seem to bother them). After building up the audience's sympathy for whales through a factual documentary approach, the narrator launches an ecology pitch at the end: "Whales are gentle and are being destroyed. Only man can help."

Some kids became very physically involved with *PORTRAIT...* They seemed to feel that they were in the water with the whales. At one screening with an all-Chinese class (a group which spoke

limited English), several eight-year-old boys in the front row were reaching toward the screen with open palms, trying to catch the spray. This audience wriggled delightedly, maintaining a running commentary throughout. When the lights came on, they kept saying, "He got us all wet!" It may have helped that the screening took place in a school auditorium; perhaps kids felt they were in the picture because it was so large.

PORTRAIT OF A WHALE is fine for programs and discussions dealing with animals, ecological problems, and extinction. It is also good for body movement activities -- you virtually have to let the kids get up and move around after viewing the film.

Great for ages five to twelve.

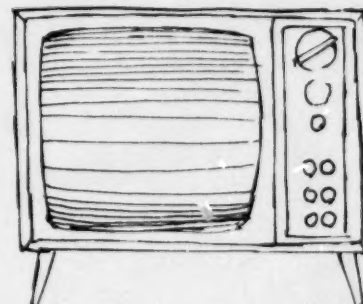
THE ROBOT 18min MFI nonverbal
object animation 1978
(Frank Gardner/USA)

This is KING KONG revisited, non-verbally, in puppet animation but, as one boy put it, "It doesn't have the girl." The film opens with a slow pan of toys around a Christmas tree. Different ones start to move and a gift box starts shaking, falls open, and out comes.....The Robot! He wreaks havoc, smashing things, to the accompaniment of an intense and dissonant electronic soundtrack. Toy soldiers mobilize and soon "Robot is Captured." The film is punctuated with old-fashioned penny thriller headlines, giving the sense of an ongoing national disaster.

The Robot is exhibited at a vaudeville-type show along with other puppet attractions but when a newsreel flashes onto the puppet-theatre screen telling of the Robot's capture, he goes berserk and breaks his chains. The Robot runs amok -- sinking ships, appearing at a doll-woman's window and making her faint, crushing power lines, and generally making a mess. He finally climbs atop a burning building and falls to the ground. "Robot Dead" proclaim the headlines, and a celebration follows.

Even though they were familiar with the story and basically knew what was going to happen, kids (particularly boys) greatly enjoyed the suspense and drama of THE ROBOT. They became somewhat restless during the puppet entertainment scenes of the vaudeville show and the final celebration, both of which were a bit too long. The final sequence, in particular, seems to drag. The Robot is dead, normalcy is restored (isn't it?) and the celebration seems hollow. But perhaps that is as it should be -- life without demons might be very tame.

THE ROBOT is an excellent lead-in to box-art activities and discussions of contemporary myths, and it works quite well in science fiction and horror movie programs. It can also be used in programs dealing with Christmas and toys. Be careful of what you program after THE ROBOT; a lighter, less intense film might be a let-down for your audience (see ALLIGATORS ALL AROUND).



THE SEVEN WISHES OF JOANNA
PEABODY 29min LCA liveaction
1978 (Stephen Foreman/USA)

Joanna Peabody is always in the middle. She's in the middle of her family, with an older sister and a younger brother, and in the middle of her mother's fights with her sister, for which she is often the scapegoat. She's always the one who's given the responsibility and ends up with the blame. THE SEVEN WISHES OF JOANNA PEABODY is the story of Joanna, a black preadolescent girl who lives in an urban tenement and is based on the book by Genevieve Gray.

Joanna's mother, a single parent, works as a maid and leaves Joanna and her sister, Duvelle, to clean up the apartment and mind their baby brother. Duvelle promptly leaves, against their mother's

specific instructions, to go in search of boys (Duvell is pretty, Joanna is not, yet). Angrily, Joanna ignores the pile of dishes in the sink and turns on the TV to "Let's Make a Deal." Lo and behold, in the middle of the game show, a black fairy godmother (played by Butterfly McQueen) appears on the screen. She introduces herself as Aunt Thelma and tells Joanna that she can have seven wishes. Joanna promptly wishes for shiny shoes, clean dishes, and inadvertently (though traditionally) squanders her third wish when she says to her brother, "I wish you would be quiet." Joanna's next wish is for "a lot of pretty clothes" because the girl across the way has been making fun of Joanna's hand-me-downs. The apartment is suddenly deluged with clothes dropping from above; Duvell enters just in time to accuse Joanna of having stolen them.

Slowly, Joanna is beginning to get the idea (with a little prompting from Aunt Thelma) that when she makes wishes for herself, they tend to backfire. Her next wish is that the apartment be redecorated to make her mother happy. Enter a team of painters who do a step-and shuffle dance. She then gets the idea of having her sister fall in love, and Duvell promptly falls for the nearest painter. This makes Duvell happy and rids Joanna of her unwanted big sister (Duvell and the painter immediately ride off in a beribboned painter's truck). Joanna decides to use her final wish for her fairy godmother and wishes that her arthritic knees be cured. Aunt Thelma is delighted and, in her joy at her newly functional knees, stands up, and she, too, does a little dance.

The premise or moral of the film is questionable. Joanna's wishes backfire not because she wishes for things for herself, but because of the types of wishes she makes. (Why couldn't she have asked to go to college, or get a good job, or have a talent?). The film also reinforces the idea of the TV as the consumer's wish-box something the filmmaker and the original book's author were obviously aware of since Butterfly McQueen cuts in on "Let's Make A Deal."

In another bow to the consumer ethic, the film gives the impression that a newly decorated apartment solves all of Joanna's mother's problems and makes her a happy person. This is a dangerous myth -- that a cosmetic change can work internal wonders. Also, did the painters and the fairy godmother have to dance?

Despite (or perhaps because of) these problems, kids seemed to love this film. We showed THE SEVEN WISHES... to the same inner-city school recess group that saw MARTIN THE COBELER. They were very taken with it and for weeks after asked if we'd brought the film again. The principal came to us and said, "I don't know what it was about that film, but the kids keep talking about it and asking for it."

THE SEVEN WISHES OF JOANNA PEABODY is great for discussions of advertising and consumer awareness, media criticism, and values. It can also be used in activities dealing with change and transformation, character studies and role playing, and for programs and activities dealing with humor and nonsense.

Fine for eight to fourteen-year-olds.

SMILEY 20min Third Eye liveaction
1978 (Beverly Simon/USA)

SMILEY opens with a lyrical shot of Jesse, a preadolescent boy, walking along abandoned railroad tracks with his dog on a brilliant fall day. A female narrator says, "This is the true story of a boy and his dog."

Flashback!

Jesse finds a dog under the bushes next to his suburban home. He names the dog "Smiley" and hopes he can keep it. His parents, typically, warn Jesse not to become attached to the dog since someone will undoubtedly claim it. As the days pass, Smiley becomes part of the household and even Jesse's parents become fond of the dog. On a shopping trip to town several days later, Smiley unexpectedly leaps out of the car and runs away.

Jesse is heartbroken. With help from his parents, he posts signs and puts an ad in the paper asking for the return of Smiley. They all wait for the phone to ring and at long last, a woman calls. When she drives up in her station wagon with her son and Smiley, the woman (the original owner of Smiley) explains that her son cannot keep the dog. Her doctor discovered that he is allergic to dogs. The boys shake hands and Jesse has Smiley for keeps.

SMILEY has a few problems. The dialog has been reduced to banalities; the mother says "How was your day?" when her husband comes home from work and he responds with an equally revealing line. Our viewers squirmed during a family dinner scene, probably because the actors seemed uncomfortable with their lines. Kids commented on the dialog in a scene where Jesse rebuffs a female friend's efforts to console him over the loss of Smiley. She leaves after delivering the improbable (but possibly "positive role model") line, "You're really touchy, aren't you?" Kids remarked that if a friend of theirs had been as nasty as Jesse, they would have called him something a good deal stronger than "touchy."

The primary problem, however, has to do with plot resolution. The felicitous coincidence of the ending deprives Jesse (as well as his parents) of the opportunity to come up with a creative solution to their problem. Instead of having to deal with the difficulty of wanting something that belongs to somebody else, the allergy of Smiley's original owner relieves Jesse of all responsibility for making a decision or coping with loss. This is especially anticlimactic because he is repeatedly told, "Don't get attached to him," and warned by his parents that he may run into difficulty with his new-found pet.

Kids, however, liked this film. There are many close-ups of the dog which, combined with the textures and colors of New England autumn, make the film visually appealing. When asked for comments, kids said they loved the dog; it made them think of dogs owned or dreamed of. Unfortunately, they were unable to discuss what they would

have done in Jesse's place -- probably because his problem is solved without any effort on his part.

SMILEY can be used in animal programs and is appropriate for ages six through eight.



TILLIE'S PHILODENDRON 7min EBE
nonverbal animation 1977
(Mitchell Rose/USA)

TILLIE'S PHILODENDRON is a non-verbal film done in painterly, textured animation. Tillie lives a fairly solitary life, with a flute for companionship. While walking by a plant store, Tillie sees a philodendron in the window and takes it home. She serenades the plant, which responds; it grows and grows. Her other companion, a disagreeable man, appears only at mealtime. When he throws one fit too many, Tillie tweaks his nose and he leaves, never to be seen again. After that, Tillie lives contentedly with her philodendron and her flute. She grows old and wrinkled as the philodendron becomes ever more lush. Tillie dies and we see her tombstone; before long a philodendron sprouts from the mound and begins to grow.

Although this introspective allegory was not created for children, the poignant story and simple, somewhat abstract images are evocative. It provides a minimum of information and kids had to figure out the film for themselves. They discussed various possibilities while watching the film and afterwards came up with many interpretations. The promotional literature for TILLIE... says

that Tillie is unhappily married. Kids thought the man was her father or her husband; one girl said he might be the landlord. A class of six and seven-year-olds disagreed about Tillie's sex: "It was about a man who had a plant." "No, it was a girl." "No, a boy." "Boys don't wear dresses." This open-ended aspect of TILLIE'S PHILODENDRON can be stimulating if the film is introduced so that kids know that there are various interpretations.

TILLIE... can be used as a lead-in to dramatic activities, body movement, or mime; also for discussing personality types, family relationships, and making the best of bad situations. It offers kids the opportunity to expand their interpretative and communication skills.

TILLIE'S PHILODENDRON works with ages six through eight but it would probably work better with older kids.

THE YOUTH WHO WANTED TO SHIVER
11min Bosustow animation 1978
(Sam Weiss/USA)

This animated film, based on Eric Carle's storybook adaptation of a Grimm fairytale, tells of Jack, a dark-skinned youth, who was so brave he didn't know how to shiver. Jack wonders what he's missing and asks the local sexton for help. The sexton sends him to a haunted church tower, but when he creeps up behind Jack and tries to scare him, Jack kicks what he thinks is a ghost down the stairs. Jack then sets out into the world to find something that will scare him enough to make him shiver. He talks calmly to two newly-hung corpses, then heads for a haunted castle where he must spend three nights. He survives two-headed cats, flying beds, and monsters without a shake, and on the third morning Jack learns that he has broken a spell and can have the princess of the castle for his wife. Jack marries the princess, but his original problem remains. His new wife proves resourceful, however, and when she pours a bowl of fish down Jack's night-shirt, he shivers all over, at last.

The male narrator of THE YOUTH WHO WANTED TO SHIVER gives a storyteller's delivery and the TV-influenced

limited animation is somewhat "cartoony," but this is not out of keeping with the directness and simplicity of the story. Kids participated actively while watching the film; they seemed to enjoy the scary parts and laughed in relief at Jack's lack of concern. A bright second-grade class said Jack was brave "'cause he was stupid" and some thought that Jack's lack of fear made him a "weird kid."

THE YOUTH WHO WANTED TO SHIVER can be used to discuss fears and other aspects of the imagination, and for activities and programs dealing with folktales, journeys, and storytelling. It works best with ages five through eight.

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